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THE AMBASSADORS.

BY HENRY JAMES.

PART VII.

XVI.

It was not the first time Strether had sat alone in the great dim church—still less was it the first of his giving himself up, so far as conditions permitted, to its beneficent action on his nerves. He had been to Notre Dame with Waymarsh, he had been there with Miss Gostrey, he had been there with Chad Newsome, and had found the place, even in company, such a refuge from the obsession of his problem that, with renewed pressure from that source, he had not unnaturally recurred to a remedy that seemed so, for the moment, to meet the case. He was conscious enough that it was only for the moment, but good moments—if he could call them good—still had their value for a man who, by this time, struck himself as living almost disgracefully from hand to mouth. Having so well learnt the way, he had lately made the pilgrimage more than once by himself—had quite stolen off, taking an unnoticed chance and making no point of speaking of the adventure when restored to his friends.

His great friend, for that matter, was still absent, as well as remarkably silent; even at the end of three weeks Miss Gostrey had not come back. She wrote to him from Mentone, admitting that he must judge her grossly inconsequent—perhaps, in fact, for the time, odiously faithless; but asking for patience, for a deferred sentence, throwing herself, in short, on his generosity. For her too, she could assure him, life was complicated—more complicated than he could have guessed; she had moreover made certain of him—certain of not wholly missing him on her return—before her disappearance. If furthermore she didn't burden him with letters it was frankly because of her sense of the other great commerce he had to carry on. He himself, at the end of a fortnight, had written twice, to show how his generosity could be trusted; but he reminded himself in each case of Mrs. Newsome's epistolary manner at the times when Mrs. Newsome kept off delicate ground. He sank his problem, he talked of Waymarsh and Miss Barrace,

of little Bilham and the set over the river, with whom he had again had tea, and he was easy, for convenience, about Chad and Mme. de Vionnet and Jeanne. He admitted that he continued to see them, he was, decidedly, so confirmed a haunter of Chad's premises, and that young man's practical intimacy with them was so undeniably great; but he had his reason for not attempting to render for Miss Gostrey's benefit the impression of these last days. That would be to tell her too much about himself—it being at present just from himself that he was trying to escape.

This small struggle sprang not a little, in its way, from the same impulse that had now carried him across to Notre Dame; the impulse to let things be, to give them time to justify themselves or at least to pass. He was aware of having no errand in such a place but the desire not to be, for the hour, in certain other places; a sense of safety, of simplification, which, each time he yielded to it, he amused himself by thinking of as a private concession to cowardice. The great church had no altar for his worship, no direct voice for his soul; but it was none the less soothing even to sanctity; for he could feel while there what he couldn't elsewhere, that he was a plain tired man taking the holiday he had earned. He was tired, but he wasn't plain—that was the pity and the trouble of it; he was able, however, to drop his problem at the door very much as if it had been the copper piece that he deposited, on the threshold, in the receptacle of the inveterate blind beggar. He trod the long, dim nave, sat in the splendid choir, paused before the clustered chapels of the east end, and the mighty monument laid upon him its spell. He might have been a student under the charm of a museum—which was exactly what, in a foreign town, in the afternoon of life, he would have liked to be free to be. This form of sacrifice, at any rate, did, for the occasion, as well as another; it made him quite sufficiently understand how, within the precinct, for the real refugee, the things of the world could fall into abeyance. That was the cowardice, probably—to dodge them, to beg the question, not to deal with it in the hard outer light; but his own oblivions were too brief, too vain, to hurt any one but himself, and he had a vague and fanciful kindness for certain persons whom he met, figures of mystery and anxiety, and whom, with observation for his pastime, he ranked as those who were fleeing from justice. Justice was outside, in the hard light, and injustice too; but one was as absent as the other from the air of the long aisles and the brightness of the many altars.

Thus it was, at all events, that, one morning some dozen days after the dinner in the Boulevard Malesherbes at which Mme. de Vionnet had been present with her daughter, he was called upon to play his part in an encounter that deeply stirred his imagination. He had the habit, in these contemplations, of watching a fellow-visitor, here and there, from a respectable distance, remarking some note of behavior, of penitence, of prostration, of the absolved,

relieved state; this was the manner in which his vague tenderness took its course, the degree of demonstration to which, naturally, it had to confine itself. It had not, indeed, so felt its responsibility as when, on this occasion, he suddenly measured the suggestive effect of a lady whose supreme stillness, in the shade of one of the chapels, he had two or three times noticed as he made, and made once more, his slow circuit. She was not prostrate—not in any degree bowed, but she was strangely fixed, and her prolonged immobility showed her, while he passed and paused, as wholly given up to the need, whatever it was, that had brought her there. She only sat and gazed before her, as he himself often sat; but she had placed herself, as he never did, within the focus of the shrine, and she had lost herself, he could easily see, as he would only have liked to do. She was not a wandering alien, keeping back more than she gave, but one of the familiar, the intimate, the fortunate, for whom these dealings had a method and a meaning. She reminded our friend—since it was the way of nine-tenths of his current impressions to act as recalls of things imagined—of some fine, firm, concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had he had a hand for drama, he might himself have written, renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected meditation. Her back, as she sat, was turned to him, but his impression absolutely required that she should be young and interesting, and she carried her head, moreover, even in the sacred shade, with a discernible faith in herself, a kind of implied conviction of consistency, security, impunity. But what had such a woman come for if she hadn't come to pray? Strether's reading of such matters was, it must be owned, confused; but he wondered if her attitude were some congruous fruit of absolution, of "indulgence." He knew but dimly what indulgence, in such a place, might mean; yet he had, as with a soft sweep, a vision of how it might indeed add to the zest of active rites. All this was a good deal to have been denoted by a mere lurking figure who was nothing to him; but, the last thing before leaving the church, he had the surprise of a still deeper quickening.

He had dropped upon a seat half-way down the nave and, again in the museum mood, was trying with head thrown back and eyes aloft, to reconstitute a past, to reduce it in fact to the convenient terms of Victor Hugo, whom, a few days before, giving the rein for once in a way to the joy of life, he had purchased in seventy bound volumes, a miracle of cheapness, parted with, he was assured by the shopman, at the price of the red-and-gold alone. He looked, doubtless, while he played his eternal nippers over Gothic glooms, sufficiently rapt in reverence; but what his thought had finally bumped against was the question of where, among packed accumulations, so multiform a wedge would be able to enter. Were seventy volumes in red-and-gold to be perhaps what he should most substantially have to show at Woollett as the fruit of his mission? It

was a possibility that held him a minute—held him till he happened to feel that some one, unnoticed, had approached him and paused. Turning, he saw that a lady stood there as for a greeting, and he sprang up as he next perceived that the lady was Mme. de Vionnet, who appeared to have recognized him as she passed near him on her way to the door. She checked, quickly and gayly, a certain confusion in him, came to meet it, turned it back, by an art of her own; the confusion threatened him as he knew her for the person he had lately been observing. She was the lurking figure of the dim chapel; she had occupied him more than she guessed; but it came to him in time, luckily, that he needn't tell her and that no harm, after all, had been done. She herself, for that matter, straightway showed that she felt their encounter as the happiest of accidents—had for him a "You come here too?" that despoiled surprise of every awkwardness.

"I come often," she said; "I love this place; but I'm terrible, in general, for churches. The old women who live in them all know me; in fact I'm already myself one of the old women. It's like that, at all events, that I foresee I shall end." Looking about for a chair, so that he instantly pulled one nearer, she sat down with him again to the sound of an "Oh, I like so much your also being fond—!"

He confessed the extent of his feeling, though she left the object vague; and he was struck with the tact, the taste of her vagueness, which simply took for granted in him a sense of beautiful things. He was conscious of how much it was affected, this sense, by something subdued and discreet in the way she had arranged herself for her special object and her morning walk—he believed her to have come on foot; the way her slightly thicker veil was drawn—a mere touch, but everything; the composed gravity of her dress, in which, here and there, a dull wine-color seemed to gleam faintly through black; the charming discretion of her small, compact head; the quiet note, as she sat, of her folded, gray-gloved hands. It was, to Strether's mind, as if she sat on her own ground, the light honors of which, at an open gate, she thus easily did him, while all the vastness and mystery of the property stretched off behind. When people were so completely in possession they could be extraordinarily civil; and our friend indeed, at this hour, had a kind of revelation of her heritage. She was romantic for him far beyond what she could have guessed, and again he found his small comfort in the conviction that, subtle though she were, his impression must remain a secret from her. The thing that, once more, made him uneasy for secrets in general was this particular patience she could have with his own want of color; albeit that, on the other hand, his uneasiness pretty well dropped after he had been for ten minutes as colorless as possible and at the same time as responsive.

The moments had already, for that matter, drawn their deepest

tinge from the special interest excited in him by his vision of his companion's identity with the person whose attitude before the glimmering altar had so impressed him. This attitude fitted admirably into the stand he had privately taken about her connection with Chad on the last occasion of his seeing them together. It helped him to stick fast at the point he had then reached; it was there, he had resolved, that he *would* stick, and at no moment since had it seemed as easy to do so. Unassailably innocent was a relation that could make one of the parties to it so carry herself. If it wasn't innocent why did she haunt the churches?—into which, given the woman he could believe he made out, she would never have come to flaunt an insolence of guilt. She haunted them for continued help, for strength, for peace—sublime support which, if one were able to look at it so, she found from day to day. They talked, in low, easy tones and with lifted, lingering looks, about the great monument and its history and its beauty—all of which, Mme. de Vionnet professed, came to her most in the other, the outer view. "We'll presently, after we go," she said, "walk round it again if you like. I'm not in a particular hurry, and it will be pleasant to look at it again with you." He had spoken of the great romancer and the great romance, and of what, to his imagination, they had done for the whole, mentioning to her moreover the exorbitance of his purchase, the seventy blazing volumes that were so out of proportion.

"Out of proportion to what?"

"Well, to any other plunge." Yet he felt even as he spoke how at that instant he was plunging. He had made up his mind and was impatient to get into the air; for his purpose was a purpose to be uttered outside, and he had a fear that it might with delay still slip away from him. She, however, took her time; she drew out their quiet gossip as if she had wished to profit by their meeting, and that, precisely, confirmed an interpretation of her manner, of her mystery. While she rose, as he would have called it, to the question of Victor Hugo, her voice itself, the light, low quaver of her deference to the solemnity about them, seemed to make her words mean something that they didn't mean openly. Help, strength, peace, a sublime support—she had not found so much of these things as that the amount wouldn't be sensibly greater for any scrap his appearance of faith in her might enable her to feel in her hand. Every little, in a long strain, helped, and if he happened to affect her as a firm object she could hold on by, he wouldn't jerk himself out of her reach. People in difficulties held on by what was nearest, and he was perhaps, after all, not further off than sources of comfort more abstract. It was as to this he had made up his mind; he had made it up, that is, to give her a sign. The sign would be that—though it was her own affair—he understood; the sign would be that—though it was her own affair—she was free to clutch. Since she took him for a firm object—much as he might to

his own sense appear at times to rock—he would do his best to *be* one.

The end of it was that, half an hour later, they were seated together, for an early luncheon, at a wonderful, a delightful house of entertainment on the left bank—a place of pilgrimage for the knowing, they were both aware, the knowing who came, for its great renown, the homage of restless days, from the other end of the town. Strether had already been there three times—first with Miss Gostrey, then with Chad, then with Chad again and with Waymarsh and little Bilham, all of whom he had himself sagaciously entertained; and his pleasure was deep now on learning that Mme. de Vionnet had not yet been initiated. When he had said, as they strolled round the church, by the river, acting at last on what, within, he had made up his mind to, “Will you, if you have time, come to *déjeuner* with me somewhere? For instance, if you know it, over there on the other side, which is so easy a walk—” and then had named the place; when he had done this she stopped short as for quick intensity, and yet deep difficulty, of response. She took in the proposal as if it were almost too charming to be true; and there had perhaps never yet been for her companion so unexpected a moment of pride—so fine, so odd a case, at any rate, as his finding himself thus able to offer to a person in such universal possession a new, a rare amusement. She had heard of the happy spot, but she asked him in reply to a further question how in the world he could suppose her to have been there. He supposed himself to have supposed that Chad might have taken her, and she guessed this the next moment, to his no small discomfort.

“Ah, let me explain,” she smiled, “that I don’t go about with him in public; I never have such chances—not having them otherwise—and it’s just the sort of thing that, as a quiet creature living in my hole, I adore.” It was more than kind of him to have thought of it—though, frankly, if he asked whether she had time, she hadn’t a single minute. That, however, made no difference—she would throw everything over. Every duty, at home, domestic, maternal, social, awaited her; but it was a case for a high line. Her affairs would go to smash; but hadn’t one a right to one’s snatch of scandal when one was prepared to pay? It was on this pleasant basis of costly disorder, consequently, that they eventually seated themselves, on either side of a small table, at a window adjusted to the busy quay and the shining, barge-burdened Seine; where, for an hour, in the matter of letting himself go, of diving deep, Strether was to feel that he had touched bottom. He was to feel many things on this occasion, and one of the first of them was that he had travelled far since that evening, in London, before the theatre, when his dinner with Maria Gostrey, between the pink-shaded candles, had struck him as requiring so many explanations. He had at that time gathered them in, the explanations—he had stored them up; but it was at present as if he had either soared above or sunk below

them—he couldn't tell which; he could somehow think of none that didn't seem to leave the appearance of collapse and cynicism easier for him than lucidity. How could he wish it to be lucid for others, for any one, that he, for the hour, saw reasons enough in the mere way the bright, clean, ordered water-side life came in at the open window?—the mere way Mme. de Vionnet, opposite him over their intensely white table-linen, their *omelette aux tomates*, their bottle of straw-colored Chablis, thanked him for everything almost with the smile of a child, while her gray eyes moved in and out of their talk, back to the quarter of the warm spring air, in which early summer had already begun to throb, and then back again to his face and their human questions.

Their human questions became many before they had done—many more, as one after the other came up, than our friend's free fancy had at all foreseen. The sense he had had before, the sense he had had repeatedly, the sense that the situation was running away with him, had never been so sharp as now; and all the more that he could perfectly put his finger on the moment it had taken the bit in its teeth. That accident had definitely occurred, the other evening, after Chad's dinner; it had occurred, as he fully knew at the moment when he interposed between this lady and her child, when he suffered himself so to discuss with her a matter closely concerning them that her own subtlety, with its significant "Thank you!" instantly sealed the occasion in her favor. Again he had held off for ten days, but the situation had continued out of hand in spite of that; the fact that it was running so fast being indeed just *why* he had held off. What had come over him as he recognized her in the nave of the church was that holding off could be but a losing game from the instant she was worked for not only by her subtlety, but by the hand of fate itself. If all the accidents were to fight on her side—and by the actual showing they loomed large—he could only give himself up. This was what he had done in privately deciding then and there to propose she should breakfast with him. What did the success of his proposal in fact resemble but the smash in which a regular runaway properly ends? The smash was their walk, their luncheon, their omelette, the Chablis, the place, the view, their present talk and his present pleasure in it—to say nothing, wonder of wonders, of her own. To this tune and nothing less, accordingly, was his surrender made good. It sufficiently lighted up at least the folly of holding off. Ancient proverbs sounded, for his memory, in the tone of their words and the clink of their glasses, in the hum of the town and the plash of the river. It *was* clearly better to suffer as a sheep than as a lamb. One might as well perish by the sword as by famine.

"Maria's still away?"—that was the first thing she had asked him; and when he had found the frankness to be cheerful about it in spite of the meaning he knew her to attach to Miss Gostrey's absence, she had gone on to inquire if he didn't tremendously miss

her. There were reasons that made him by no means sure, yet he nevertheless answered "Tremendously"; which she took in as if it were all she had wished to prove. Then, "A man in trouble *must* be possessed, somehow, of a woman," she said; "if she doesn't come in one way she comes in another."

"Why do you call me a man in trouble?"

"Ah, because that's the way you strike me." She spoke ever so gently and as if with all fear of wounding him while she sat partaking of his bounty. "Aren't you in trouble?"

He felt himself color at the question, and then he hated that—hated to pass for anything so idiotic as woundable. Woundable by Chad's lady, in respect to whom he had come out with such a fund of indifference—was he already at that point? Perversely, meanwhile, however, his pause gave a strange air of truth to her supposition; and what was he in fact but disconcerted at having struck her just in the way he had most dreamed of not doing? "I'm not in trouble yet," he at last smiled. "I'm not in trouble now."

"Well, I'm always so. But that you sufficiently know." She was a woman who, between courses, could be graceful with her elbows on the table. It was a posture unknown to Mrs. Newsome, but it was easy for a *femme du monde*. "Yes—I am 'now'!"

"There was a question you put to me," he presently returned, "the night of Chad's dinner. I didn't answer it then, and it has been very handsome of you not to have sought an occasion for pressing me about it since."

She was instantly all there. "Of course I know what you allude to. I asked you what you had meant by saying, the day you came to see me, just before you left me, that you would save me. And you then said—at our friend's—that you would have really to wait to see, for yourself, what you did mean."

"Yes, I asked for time," said Strether. "And it sounds now, as you put it, like a very ridiculous speech."

"Oh!" she murmured—she was full of attenuation. But she had another thought. "If it does sound ridiculous, why do you deny that you're in trouble?"

"Ah, if I were," he replied, "it wouldn't be the trouble of fearing ridicule. I don't fear it."

"What then do you?"

Nothing—now." And he leaned back in his chair.

I like your 'now'!" she laughed across at him.

Well, it's precisely that it fully comes to me at present that I've kept you long enough. I know by this time, at any rate, what I meant by my speech; and I really knew it the night of Chad's dinner."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Because it was difficult at the moment. I had already at that moment done something for you, in the sense of what I had said

the day I went to see you; but I wasn't then sure of the importance I might represent this as having."

She was all eagerness. "And you're sure now?"

"Yes; I see that, practically, I've done for you—had done for you when you put me your question—all that it's as yet possible to me to do. I feel now," he went on, "that it may go further than I thought. What I did after my visit to you," he explained, "was to write straight off to Mrs. Newsome about you, and I'm at last, from one day to the other, expecting her answer. It's this answer that will represent, as I believe, the consequences."

Patient and beautiful was her interest. "I see—the consequences of your speaking for me." And she waited, as if not to hustle him.

He acknowledged it by immediately going on. "The question, you understand, was *how* I should save you. Well, I'm trying it by thus letting her know that I consider you worth saving."

"I see—I see." Her eagerness broke through. "How can I thank you enough?" He couldn't tell her that, however, and she quickly pursued: "You do really, for yourself, consider it?"

His only answer at first was to help her to the dish that had been freshly put before them. "I've written to her again since then—I've left her in no doubt of what I think. I've told her all about you."

"Thanks—not so much. 'All about' me," she went on—"yes."

"All it seems to me," said Strether, "you've done for him."

"Ah, and you might have added all it seems to *me*!" She laughed again, while she took up her knife and fork, as in the cheer of these assurances. "But you're not sure how she'll take it."

"No, I'll not pretend I'm sure."

"*Voilà.*" And she waited a moment. "I wish you'd tell me about her."

"Oh," said Strether with a slightly strained smile, "all that need concern you about her is that she's really a grand person."

Mme. de Vionnet seemed to demur. "Is that all that need concern me about her?"

But Strether neglected the question. "Hasn't Chad talked to you?"

"Of his mother? Yes, a great deal—immensely. But not from your point of view."

"He can't," our friend returned, "have said any ill of her."

"Not the least bit. He has given me, like you, the assurance that she's really grand. But her being really grand is somehow just what has not seemed to simplify our case. Nothing," she continued, "is further from me than to wish to say a word against her; but of course I feel how little she can like being told of her owing me anything. No woman ever enjoys such an obligation to another woman."

This was a proposition Strether couldn't contradict. "And yet

what other way could I have expressed to her what I felt? It's what there was most to say about you."

"Do you mean then that she *will* be good to me?"

"It's what I'm waiting to see. But I've little doubt she would," he added, "if she could comfortably see you."

It seemed to strike her as a happy, a beneficent thought. "Oh then, couldn't that be managed? Wouldn't she come out? Wouldn't she if you so put it to her? *Did* you by any possibility?" she faintly quavered.

"Oh no"—he was prompt. "Not that. It would be, much more, to give an account of you that—since there's no question of *your* paying the visit—I should go home first."

It instantly made her graver. "And are you thinking of that?"

"Oh, all the while, naturally."

"Stay with us—stay with us!" she exclaimed on this. "That's your only way to make sure."

"To make sure of what?"

"Why, that he doesn't break up. You didn't come out to do that to him."

"Doesn't it depend," Strether returned after a moment, "on what you mean by breaking up?"

"Oh, you know well enough what I mean!"

His silence, again, for a little, seemed to denote an understanding. "You take for granted remarkable things."

"Yes, I do—to the extent that I don't take for granted vulgar ones. You're perfectly capable of seeing that what you came out for was not really at all to do what you would now have to do."

"Ah, it's perfectly simple," Strether good-humoredly pleaded. "I've had but one thing to do—to put our case before him. To put it as it could only be put, here, on the spot—by personal pressure. My dear lady," he lucidly pursued, "my work, you see, is really done, and my reasons for staying on even another day are none of the best. Chad's in possession of our case and professes to do it full justice. What remains is with himself. I've had my rest, my amusement and refreshment; I've had, as we say at Woollett, a lovely time. Nothing in it has been more lovely than this happy meeting with you—in these fantastic conditions to which you've so delightfully consented. I've a sense of success. It's what I wanted. My getting all this good is what Chad has waited for, and I gather that if I'm ready to go he's the same."

She shook her head with a finer, deeper wisdom. "You're not ready. If you're ready why did you write to Mrs. Newsome in the sense you've mentioned to me?"

Strether considered. "I sha'n't go before I hear from her. You're too much afraid of her," he added.

It produced between them a long look from which neither shrank. "I don't think you believe that—believe I've not really reason to fear her."

"She's capable of great generosity," Strether presently declared.

"Well then, let her trust me a little. That's all I ask. Let her recognize, in spite of everything, what I've done."

"Ah, remember," our friend replied, "that she can't effectually recognize it without seeing it for herself. Let Chad go over and show her what you've done, and let him plead with her there for it and, as it were, for *you*."

She measured the depth of this suggestion. "Do you give me your word of honor that if she once has him there she won't do her best to marry him?"

It made her companion, this inquiry, look again a while out at the view; after which he spoke without sharpness. "When she sees for herself what he is—"

But she had already broken in. "It's when she sees for herself what he is that she'll want to marry him most."

Strether's attitude, that of due deference to what she said, permitted him to attend for a minute to his luncheon. "I doubt if that will come off. It won't be easy to make it."

"It will be easy if he remains there—and he'll remain for the money. The money appears to be, as a probability, so hideously much."

"Well," Strether presently concluded, "nothing *could* really hurt you but his marrying."

She gave a strange light laugh. "Putting aside what may really hurt *him*."

But her friend looked at her as if he had thought of that too. "The question will come up, of course, of the future that you yourself offer him."

She was leaning back now, but she fully faced him. "Well, let it come up!"

"The point is that it's for Chad to make of it what he can. His being proof against marriage will show what he does make."

"If he *is* proof, yes"—she accepted the proposition. "But for myself," she added, "the question is what *you* make."

"Ah, I make nothing. It's not my affair."

"I beg your pardon. It's just there that, since you've taken it up and are committed to it, it most intensely becomes yours. You're not saving me, I take it, for your interest in myself, but for your interest in our friend. The one, at any rate, is wholly dependent on the other. You can't in honor not see me through," she wound up, "because you can't in honor not see *him*."

Strange and beautiful to him was her quiet, soft acuteness. The thing that most moved him was really that she was so deeply serious. She had none of the portentous forms of it, but he had never come in contact, it struck him, with a spirit brought to so fine a point. Mrs. Newsome, goodness knew, was serious; but it was nothing to this. He took it all in, he saw it all together. "No," he mused, "I can't in honor not see him."

Her face affected him as with an exquisite light. "You *will* then?" "I will."

At this she pushed back her chair and was the next moment on her feet. "Thank you!" she said with her hand held out to him across the table and with no less a meaning in the words than her lips had so particularly given them after Chad's dinner. The golden nail she had then driven in pierced a good inch deeper. Yet he reflected that he himself had only meanwhile done what he had made up his mind to on the same occasion. So far as the essence of the matter went he had simply stood fast on the spot on which he had then planted his feet.

XVII.

He received three days after this a communication from America, in the form of a scrap of blue paper folded and gummed, not reaching him through his bankers, but delivered at his hotel by a small boy in uniform, who, under instructions from the concierge, approached him as he slowly paced the little court. It was the evening hour, but daylight was long now and Paris more than ever penetrating. The scent of flowers was in the streets, he had the whiff of violets perpetually in his nose; and he had attached himself to sounds and suggestions, vibrations of the air, human and dramatic, he imagined, as they were not in other places, that came out for him more and more as the mild afternoons deepened—a far-off hum, a sharp, near click on the asphalt, a voice calling, replying, somewhere, and as full of tone as an actor's in a play. He was to dine at home, as usual, with Waymarsh—they had settled to that for thrift and simplicity; and he now hung about before his friend came down.

He read his telegram in the court, standing still a long time where he had opened it and giving five minutes, afterwards, to the renewed study of it. At last, quickly, he crumpled it up as if to get it out of the way; in spite of which, however, he kept it there—still kept it when, at the end of another turn, he had dropped into a chair placed near a small table. Here, with his scrap of paper compressed in his fist and further concealed by his folding his arms tight, he sat for some time in thought, gazed before him so straight that Waymarsh appeared and approached him without catching his eye. The latter, in fact, struck with his appearance, looked at him hard for a single instant and then, as if determined to that course by some special vividness in it, dropped back into the *salon de lecture* without addressing him. But the pilgrim from Milrose permitted himself still to observe the scene from behind the clear glass plate of that retreat. Strether ended, as he sat, by a fresh scrutiny of his compressed missive, which he smoothed out carefully again as he placed it on his table. There it remained for some minutes, until, at last looking up, he saw Waymarsh watching him from within. It was on this that their

eyes met—met for a moment during which neither moved. But Strether then got up, folding his telegram more carefully and putting it into his waistcoat pocket.

A few minutes later the friends were seated together at dinner; but Strether had meanwhile said nothing about it, and they eventually parted, after coffee in the court, with nothing said on either side. Our friend had moreover the consciousness that even less than usual was said on this occasion between them, so that it was almost as if each had been waiting for something from the other. Waymarsh had always more or less the air of sitting at the door of his tent, and silence, after so many weeks, had come to play its part in their concert. This note indeed, to Strether's sense, had lately taken a fuller tone, and it was his fancy to-night that they had never quite so drawn it out. Yet it befell, none the less, that he closed the door to confidence when his companion finally asked him if there were anything particular the matter with him. "Nothing," he replied, "more than usual."

On the morrow, at an early hour, however, he found occasion to give an answer more in consonance with the facts. What was the matter had continued to be so all the previous evening, the first hours of which, after dinner, in his room, he had devoted to the copious composition of a letter. He had quitted Waymarsh for this purpose, leaving him to his own resources with less ceremony than their wont, but finally coming down again with his letter unconcluded and going forth into the streets without inquiry for his comrade. He had taken a long, vague walk, and one o'clock had struck before his return and his re-ascent to his room by the aid of the glimmering candle-end left for him on the shelf outside the porter's lodge. He had possessed himself, on closing his door, of the numerous loose sheets of his unfinished composition, and then, without reading them over, had torn them into small pieces. He had thereupon slept—as if it had been in some measure thanks to that sacrifice—the sleep of the just, and had prolonged his rest considerably beyond his custom. Thus it was that when, between nine and ten, the tap of the knob of a walking-stick sounded on his door, he had not yet made himself altogether presentable. Chad Newsome's bright, deep voice, determined quickly enough, none the less, the admission of the visitor. The little blue paper of the evening before, plainly an object the more precious for its escape from premature destruction, now lay on the sill of the open window, smoothed out afresh and kept from blowing away by the superincumbent weight of his watch. Chad, looking about with careless and competent criticism, as he looked wherever he went, immediately espied it and permitted himself to fix it for a moment rather hard. After which he turned his eyes to his host. "It has come then at last?"

Strether paused in the act of pinning his necktie. "Then you know—? You've had one too?"

"No, I've had nothing, and I only know what I see. I see that thing and I guess. Well," he added, "it comes as pat as in a play, for I've precisely turned up this morning—as I would have done yesterday, but it was impossible—to take you."

"To take me?" Strether had turned again to his glass.

"Back, at last, as I promised. I'm ready—I've really been ready this month. I've only been waiting for you—as was perfectly right. But you're better now; you're safe—I see that for myself; you've got all your good. You're looking, this morning, as fit as a flea."

Strether, at his glass, finished dressing; consulting that witness moreover on this last opinion. Was he looking preternaturally fit? There was something in it perhaps for Chad's wonderful eye, but he had felt himself, for hours, rather in pieces. Such a judgment, however, was after all but a contribution to his resolve; it testified unwittingly to his wisdom. He was still firmer, apparently—since it shone in him as a light—than he had flattered himself. His firmness indeed was slightly compromised, as he faced about to his friend, by the way this very personage looked—though the case would of course have been worse had not the secret of personal magnificence been at every hour Chad's unflinching possession. There he was in all the pleasant morning freshness of it—strong and sleek and gay, easy and fragrant and fathomless, with happy health in his color, and pleasant silver in his thick young hair, and the right word for everything on the lips that his clear brownness caused to show as red. He had never struck Strether as personally such a success; it was as if now, for his definite surrender, he had gathered himself vividly together. This, sharply and rather strangely, was the form in which he was to be presented to Woollett. Our friend took him in again—he was always taking him in and yet finding that parts of him still remained out; though even thus his image showed through a mist of other things. "I've had a cable," Strether said, "from your mother."

"I dare say, my dear man. I hope she's well."

Strether hesitated. "No—she's not well, I'm sorry to have to tell you."

"Ah," said Chad, "I must have had the instinct of it. All the more reason then that we should start straight off."

Strether had now got together hat, gloves and stick, but Chad had dropped on the sofa as if to show where he wished to make his point. He kept observing his companion's things; he might have been judging how quickly they could be packed. He might even have wished to hint that he would send his own servant to assist. "What do you mean," Strether inquired, "by 'straight off'?"

"Oh, by one of next week's boats. Everything at this season goes out so light that berths will be easy anywhere."

Strether had in his hand his telegram, which he had kept there after attaching his watch, and he now offered it to Chad, who,

however, with an odd movement, declined to take it. "Thanks, I had rather not. Your correspondence with mother is your own affair. I'm only *with* you both on it, whatever it is." Strether, at this, while their eyes met, slowly folded the missive and put it in his pocket; after which, before he had spoken again, Chad broke fresh ground. "Has Miss Gostrey come back?"

But when Strether presently spoke, it was not in answer. "It's not, I gather, that your mother is physically ill; her health, on the whole, this spring, seems to have been better than usual. But she's worried, she's anxious; and it appears to have risen within the last few days to a climax. We've tired out, between us, her patience."

"Oh, it isn't *you*!" Chad generously protested.

"I beg your pardon—it *is* me." Strether was mild and melancholy, but firm. He saw it far away and over his companion's head. "It's very particularly me."

"Well, then, all the more reason. *Marchons, marchons!*" said the young man gayly. His host, however, at this, but continued to stand agaze; and he had the next thing repeated his question of a moment before. "Has Miss Gostrey come back?"

"Yes, two days ago."

"Then you've seen her?"

"No—I'm to see her to-day." But Strether wouldn't linger now on Miss Gostrey. "Your mother sends me an ultimatum. If I can't bring you I'm to leave you; I'm to come at any rate myself."

"Ah, but you *can* bring me now," Chad, from his sofa, reassuringly replied.

Strether hesitated. "I don't think I understand you. Why was it that, more than a month ago, you put it to me so urgently to let Mme. de Vionnet speak for you?"

"'Why?' Chad considered, but he had it at his fingers' ends. "Why but because I knew how well she'd do it? It was the way to keep you quiet and, to that extent, do you good. Besides," he happily and comfortably explained, "I wanted you really to know her and to get the impression of her—and you see the good that *has* done you."

"Well," said Strether, "the way she has spoken for you, all the same—so far as I have given her a chance—has only made me feel how much she wishes to keep you. If you make nothing of that I don't see why you wanted me to listen to her."

"Why, my dear man," Chad exclaimed, "I make everything of it! How can you doubt—?"

"I doubt only because you come to me this morning with your signal to start."

Chad stared, then gave a laugh. "And isn't my signal to start just what you've been waiting for?"

Strether debated; he took another turn. "This last month I've been awaiting, I think, more than anything else, the message I have here."

"You mean you've been afraid of it?"

"Well, I was doing my business in my own way. And I suppose your present announcement," Strether went on, "isn't merely the result of your sense of what I've expected. Otherwise you wouldn't have put me in relation—" But he paused, pulling up.

At this Chad rose. "Ah, *her* wanting me not to go has nothing to do with it! It's only because she's afraid—afraid of the way that, over there, I may get caught. But her fear's groundless."

He had met again his companion's sufficiently searching look. "Are you tired of her?"

Chad gave him in reply to this, with a movement of the head, the strangest slow smile he had ever had from him. "Never."

It had immediately, on Strether's imagination, so deep and soft an effect that our friend could only, for the moment, keep it before him. "Never?"

"Never," Chad obligingly and serenely repeated.

It made his companion take several more steps. "Then *you're* not afraid."

"Afraid to go?"

Strether pulled up again. "Afraid to stay."

The young man looked brightly amazed. "You want me now to 'stay'?"

"If I don't immediately sail, the POCOcks will immediately come out. That's what I mean," said Strether, "by your mother's ultimatum."

Chad showed a still livelier but not an alarmed interest. "She has turned on Sarah and Jim?"

Strether joined him for an instant in the vision. "Oh, and you may be sure, Mamie. *That's* whom she's turning on."

This also Chad saw—he laughed out. "Mamie—to corrupt me?"

"Oh," said Strether, "she's very charming."

"So you've already more than once told me. I should like to see her."

Something happy and easy, something above all unconscious, in the way he said this, brought home again to his companion the facility of his attitude and the enviability of his state. "See her then by all means. And consider too," Strether went on, "that you really give your sister a lift in letting her come to you. You give her a couple of months of Paris, which she hasn't seen, if I'm not mistaken, since just after she was married, and which I'm sure she wants but the pretext to visit."

Chad listened, but with all his own knowledge of the world. "She has had it, the pretext, these several years, yet she has never taken it."

"Do you mean *you*?" Strether after an instant inquired.

"Certainly—the lone exile. And whom do *you* mean?" said Chad.

"Oh, I mean *me*. I'm her pretext. That is—for it comes to the same thing—I'm your mother's."

"Then why," Chad asked, "doesn't mother come herself?"

His friend gave him a long look. "Should you like her to?" And then as he for the moment said nothing: "It's perfectly open to you to cable for her."

Chad continued to think. "Will she come if I do?"

"Quite possibly. But try, and you'll see."

"Why don't *you* try?" Chad after a moment asked.

"Because I don't want to."

Chad hesitated. "Don't desire her presence here?"

Strether faced the question, and his answer was the more emphatic. "Don't put it off, my dear boy, on *me*!"

"Well—I see what you mean. I'm sure you'd behave beautifully, but you *don't* want to see her. So I won't play you that trick."

"Ah," Strether declared, "I shouldn't call it a trick. You've a perfect right, and it would be perfectly straight of you." Then he added in a different tone: "You'd have moreover, in the person of Mme. de Vionnet, a very interesting relation prepared for her."

Their eyes, on this proposition, continued to meet, but Chad's, pleasant and bold, never flinched for a moment. He got up at last, and he said something with which Strether was struck. "She wouldn't understand her, but that makes no difference. Mme. de Vionnet would like to see her. She'd like to be charming to her. She believes she could work it."

Strether thought a moment, affected by this, but finally turning away. "She couldn't!"

"You're quite sure?" Chad asked.

"Well, risk it if you like!"

Strether, who uttered this with serenity, had urged a plea for their now getting into the air, but the young man still waited. "Have you sent your answer?"

"No, I've done nothing yet."

"Were you waiting to see me?"

"No, not that."

"Only waiting"—and Chad, with this, had a smile for him—"to see Miss Gostrey?"

"No—not even Miss Gostrey. I wasn't waiting to see any one. I had only waited, till now, to make up my mind—in complete solitude; and, since I of course absolutely owe you the information, was on the point of going out with it quite made up. Have therefore a little more patience with me. Remember," Strether went on, "that that is what, originally, you asked *me* to have. I've had it, you see, and you see what has come of it. Stay on with me."

Chad looked grave. "How much longer?"

"Well, till I make you a sign. I can't myself, you know, at the best, or at the worst, stay forever. Let the POCOcks come," Strether repeated.

"Because it gains you time?"

"Yes—it gains me time."

Chad, as if it still puzzled him, waited a minute. "You don't want to get back to mother?"

"Not just yet. I'm not ready."

"You feel," Chad asked in a tone of his own, "the charm of life here?"

"Immensely." Strether faced it. "You've helped me so to feel it that that surely needn't surprise you."

"No, it doesn't surprise me, and I'm delighted. But what, my dear man," Chad went on with conscious queeriness, "does it all lead to for you?"

The change of position and of relation, for each, was so oddly betrayed in the question that Chad laughed out as soon as he had uttered it—which made Strether also laugh. "Well, to my having a certitude that has been tested—that has passed through the fire. But, oh," he couldn't help breaking out, "if within my first month here you had been willing to move with me—!"

"Well?" said Chad, while he paused as if for weight of thought.

"Well, we should have been over there by now."

"Ah, but you wouldn't have had your fun!"

"I should have had a month of it; and I'm having now, if you want to know," Strether continued, "enough to last me for the rest of my days."

Chad looked amused and interested, yet still somewhat in the dark; partly perhaps because Strether's estimate of fun had required of him from the first a good deal of interpretation. "It wouldn't do if I left you—?"

"Left me?"—Strether remained blank.

"Only for a month or two—time to go and come. Mme. de Vionnet," Chad smiled, "would look after you in the interval."

"To go back by yourself, I remaining here?" Again, for an instant, their eyes had the question out; after which Strether said: "Grotesque!"

"But I want to see mother," Chad presently returned. "Remember how long it is since I've seen mother."

"Long indeed; and that's exactly why I was originally so sharp for moving you. Hadn't you shown us enough how beautifully you could do without it?"

"Oh, but," said Chad wonderfully, "I'm better now."

There was an easy triumph in it that made his friend laugh out again. "Oh, if you were worse, I *should* know what to do with you. In that case, I believe, I'd have you gagged and strapped down, carried on board resisting, kicking. How *much*," Strether asked, "do you want to see mother?"

"How much?"—Chad seemed to find it, in fact, difficult to say.

"How much."

"Why, as much as you've made me. I'd give anything to see her. And you've left me," Chad went on "in little enough doubt as to how much *she* wants it."

Strether thought a minute. "Well then, if those things are really your motive, catch the French steamer and sail to-morrow. Of course, when it comes to that, you're absolutely free to do as you choose. From the moment you can't hold yourself, I can only accept your flight."

"I'll fly in a minute then," said Chad, "if you'll stay here."

"I'll stay here till the next steamer—then I'll follow you."

"And do you call that," Chad asked, "accepting my flight?"

"Certainly—it's the only thing to call it. The only way to keep me here, accordingly," Strether explained, "is by staying yourself."

Chad took it in. "All the more that I've really dished you, eh?"

"Dished me?" Strether echoed as inexpressively as possible.

"Why, if she sends out the Pococks it will be that she doesn't trust you; and if she doesn't trust you, that bears upon—well, you know what."

Strether decided after a moment that he did know what, and in consonance with this he spoke. "You see then, all the more, what you owe me."

"Well, if I do see how can I pay?"

"By not deserting me. By standing by me."

"Oh, I say—!" But Chad, as they went downstairs, clapped a firm hand, in the manner of a pledge, upon his shoulder. They descended slowly together and had, in the court of the hotel, some further talk, of which the upshot was that they presently separated. Chad Newsome departed, and Strether, left alone, looked about, superficially, for Waymarsh. But Waymarsh had not yet, it appeared, come down, and our friend finally went out without a sight of him.

XVIII.

At four o'clock that afternoon he had still not seen him, but he was then, as to make up for this, engaged in talk about him with Miss Gostrey. Strether had kept away from home all day, given himself up to the town and to his thoughts, wandered and mused, been at once restless and absorbed—and all with the present climax of a rich little welcome in the Quartier Marbœuf. "Waymarsh has been, 'unbeknown' to me, I'm convinced"—for Miss Gostrey had inquired—"in communication with Woollett: the consequence of which was, last night, the loudest possible call for me."

"Do you mean a letter to bring you home?"

"No—a cable, which I have at this moment in my pocket: a 'Come back by the first ship.'"

Strether's hostess, it might have been made out, just escaped changing color. Reflection arrived but in time and established a provisional serenity. It was perhaps exactly this that enabled her to say with duplicity: "And you're going—?"

"You almost deserve it when you abandon me so."

She shook her head as if this were not worth taking up. "My

absence has helped you—as I’ve only to look at you to see. It was my calculation, and I’m justified. You’re not where you were. And the thing,” she smiled, “was for me not to be there either. You can go of yourself.”

“Oh, but I feel to-day,” he comfortably declared, “that I shall want you yet.”

She took him all in again. “Well, I promise you not again to leave you, but it will only be to follow you. You’ve got your momentum, and you can toddle alone.”

He intelligently accepted it. “Yes—I suppose I can toddle. It’s the sight of that in fact that has upset Waymarsh. He can bear it—the way I strike him as going—no longer. That’s only the climax of his original feeling. He wants me to quit; and he must have written to Woollett that I’m in peril of perdition.”

“Ah, good!” she murmured. “But is it only your supposition?”

“I make it out—it explains.”

“Then he denies?—or you haven’t asked him?”

“I’ve not had time,” Strether said; “I made it out but last night, putting various things together, and I’ve not been since then face to face with him.”

She wondered. “Because you’re too disgusted? You can’t trust yourself?”

He settled his glasses on his nose. “Do I look in a great rage?”

“You look divine!”

“There’s nothing,” he went on, “to be angry about. He has done me on the contrary a service.”

She made it out. “By bringing things to a head?”

“How well you understand!” he almost groaned. “Waymarsh won’t in the least, at any rate, when I have it out with him, deny or extenuate. He has acted from the deepest conviction, with the best conscience, and after wakeful nights. He’ll recognize that he’s fully responsible, and will consider that he has been highly successful; so that any discussion we may have will bring us quite together again—bridge the dark stream that has kept us so thoroughly apart. We shall have at last, in the consequences of his act, some thing we can definitely talk about.”

She was silent a little. “How wonderfully you take it! But you’re always wonderful.”

He had a pause that matched her own; then he had, with an adequate spirit, a complete admission. “It’s quite true. I’m extremely wonderful just now. I dare say in fact I’m quite fantastic, and I shouldn’t be at all surprised if I were mad.”

“Then tell me!” she earnestly pressed. As he, however, for the time, answered nothing, only returning the look with which she watched him, she presented herself where it was easier to meet her. “What will Mr. Waymarsh exactly have done?”

“Simply have written a letter. One will have been quite enough. He has told them I want looking after.”

"And *do* you?"—she was all interest.

"Immensely. And I shall get it."

"By which you mean you don't budge?"

"I don't budge."

"You've cabled?"

"No—I've made Chad do it."

"That you decline to come?"

"That *he* declines. We had it out this morning, and I brought him round. He had come in, before I was down, to tell me he was ready—ready, I mean, to return. And he went off, after ten minutes with me, to say he wouldn't."

Miss Gostrey followed with intensity. "Then you've *stopped* him?"

Strether settled himself afresh in his chair. "I've stopped him. That is for the time. That"—he gave it to her more vividly—"is where I am."

"I see, I see. But where is Mr. Newsome? He was ready," she asked, "to go?"

"All ready."

"And sincerely—believing *you* would be?"

"Perfectly, I think; so that he was amazed to find the hand I had laid on him to pull him over suddenly converted into an engine for keeping him still."

It was an account of the matter Miss Gostrey could weigh. "Does he think the conversion sudden?"

"Well," said Strether, "I'm not altogether sure what he thinks. I'm not sure of anything that concerns him, except that the more I've seen of him the less I've found him what I originally expected. He's obscure, and that's why I'm waiting."

She wondered. "But for what in particular?"

"For the answer to his cable."

"And what was his cable?"

"I don't know," Strether replied; "it was to be, when he left me, according to his own taste. I simply said to him: 'I want to stay, and the only way for me to do so is for *you* to.' That I wanted to stay seemed to interest him, and he acted on that."

Miss Gostrey turned it over. "He wants, then, himself to stay."

"He half wants it. That is he half wants to go. My original appeal has to that extent worked in him. Nevertheless," Strether pursued, "he won't go. Not, at least, so long as I'm here."

"But you can't," his companion suggested, "stay here always. I wish you could."

"By no means. Still, I want to see him a little further. He is not in the least the case I supposed; he's quite another case. And it's as such that he interests me." It was almost as if for his own intelligence that, deliberate and lucid, our friend thus expressed the matter. "I don't want to give him up."

Miss Gostrey but wanted to help his lucidity. She had, however, to be light and tactful. "Up, you mean—a—to his mother?"

"Well, I'm not thinking of his mother now. I'm thinking of the plan of which I was the mouthpiece, which, as soon as we met, I put before him as persuasively as I knew how, and which was drawn up, as it were, in complete ignorance of all that, in this last long period, has been happening to him. It took no account whatever of the impressions I was, here on the spot, immediately to begin to receive from him—impressions of which I feel sure I'm far from having had the last."

Miss Gostrey had a smile of the most genial criticism. "So your idea is—more or less—to stay out of curiosity?"

"Call it what you like! I don't care what it's called—"

"So long as you do stay? Certainly not then. I call it, all the same, immense fun," Maria Gostrey declared; "and to see you work it out will be one of the sensations of my life. It is clear you can toddle alone!"

He received this tribute without elation. "I sha'n't be alone when the Pockocks have come."

Her eyebrows went up. "The Pockocks are coming?"

"That, I mean, is what will happen—and happen as quickly as possible—in consequence of Chad's cable. They'll simply embark. Sarah will come to speak for her mother—with an effect different from *my* muddle."

Miss Gostrey more gravely wondered. "*She* then will take him back?"

"Very possibly—and we shall see. She must at any rate have the chance, and she may be trusted to do all she can."

"And do you *want* that?"

"Of course," said Strether, "I want it. I want to play fair."

But she had lost for a moment the thread. "If it devolves on the Pockocks why do you stay?"

"Just to see that I *do* play fair—and a little also, no doubt, that *they* do." Strether was luminous as he had never been. "I came out to find myself in presence of new facts—facts that have kept striking me as less and less met by our old reasons. The matter's perfectly simple. New reasons—reasons as new as the facts themselves—are wanted; and of this our friends at Woollett—Chad's and mine—were at the earliest moment definitely notified. If any are producible Mrs. Pockock will produce them; she'll bring over the whole collection. They'll be," he added with a pensive smile, "a part of the 'fun' you speak of."

She was quite in the current now and floating by his side. "It's Mamie—so far as I've had it from you—who'll be their great card." And then, as his contemplative silence was not a denial, she significantly added: "I think I'm sorry for her."

"I think *I* am!"—and Strether sprang up, moving about a little as her eyes followed him. "But it can't be helped."

"You mean her coming out can't be?"

He explained after another turn what he meant. "The only

way for her not to come is for me to go home—as I believe that, on the spot, I could prevent it. But the difficulty as to that is that if I do go home—”

“I see, I see”—she had easily understood. “Mr. Newsome will do the same, and that’s not”—she laughed out now—“to be thought of.”

Strether had no laugh; he had only a quiet, comparatively placid look that might have shown him as proof against ridicule. “Strange, isn’t it?”

They had, in the matter that so much interested them, come so far as this without sounding another name—to which, however, their present momentary silence was full of a conscious reference. Strether’s question was a sufficient implication of the weight it had gained with him during the absence of his hostess; and just for that reason a single gesture from her could pass for him as a vivid answer. Yet he was answered still better when she said in a moment: “Will Mr. Newsome introduce his sister—?”

“To Mme. de Vionnet?” Strether spoke the name at last. “I shall be greatly surprised if he doesn’t.”

She seemed to gaze at the possibility. “You mean you’ve thought of it and you’re prepared.”

“I’ve thought of it and am prepared.”

“*Bon!* You *are* magnificent.”

“Well,” he answered after a pause and a little wearily, but still standing there before her—“well, that’s what, just once in all my dull days, I think I shall like to have been!”

(To be continued.)